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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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LEBANON: After Gemayel

Summary

Lebanese President Amin Gemayel could be forced to resign soon unless he strikes a deal with Syria and his domestic opponents. Although Gemayel has no obvious successor, any new government is likely to abrogate the 17 May Lebanon-Israel accord and request an end to the MNF mission.

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Syria wants a weak Lebanese government dependent on Damascus. The Syrians will seek political concessions for their Lebanese allies, but will not challenge Christian preeminence to the point of driving them into a mini-state dependent on Israel.

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NESA M#84-10064

This memorandum was prepared by the Levant Branch, Arab-Israeli Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis at the request of the Deputy Director of Central Intelligence. Information as of 7 February 1984 was used in its preparation. Comment and queries are welcome and should be directed to Chief, Arab-Israeli Division,

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With the security situation continuing to deteriorate, Lebanese President Amin Gemayel could be forced to resign unless he moves quickly to strike a deal with Syria and his domestic opponents. []

Gemayel has no designated successor. Under Lebanon's constitution, the prime minister and his cabinet exercise executive authority until the parliament is convened to elect a new president. Gemayel would certainly try to maintain the concept of a Christian head of state by naming a Maronite prime minister prior to his resignation. There is precedent; in 1952, President Bishara Khoury named Maronite Army commander Fuad Shihab as prime minister. []

Possible Successors

Domestic opponents have not seriously challenged the concept of a Maronite presidency. The Syrian-backed National Salvation Front in meetings last week nominated former president Suleiman Franjiyah, a longtime Syrian ally, as its candidate to succeed Gemayel. Although Christian Phalange party members and Lebanese Forces militiamen would challenge Franjiyah's candidacy, they probably are too weak to impose their own candidate. Former president Camille Shamun, although acceptable to the Phalange, would probably be vetoed by to Damascus because he has close ties to Israel. []

There are no obvious successors. Possible candidates acceptable to Syria include Fuad Lahud, a former colonel in the Lebanese Army, and former Army intelligence chief Gabriel Lahud. We do not believe Army commander Tannous has sufficient support within the Army and he is unacceptable to domestic opponents because of Army actions in West and South Beirut. Michel Khoury, president of the Lebanese Central Bank and son of Lebanon's first post-independence president, and parliamentary deputy Ilyas Harawi possibly would elicit less enmity from Christian hardliners than others more closely identified with Syria. The concept of power centralized in the presidency, however, may be fading, and we expect to see the role of the Muslim prime minister strengthened considerably. []

Impact on Key Policy Issues

Regardless of who succeeds Gemayel, the first act of a new government is likely to be the abrogation of the 17 May Lebanon-Israel troop withdrawal accord. A request for an end to the NNF mission probably would follow. Hardline Christians can be expected to react harshly to these moves, which they will see as severing their tangible ties to Israel and the US and leaving them vulnerable to the Muslim majority. Ultimately the Maronites fear that Muslim pressures for political reform will result in significant revisions to the 1943 confessional arrangement that established Christian hegemony in Lebanon. []

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Road to Damascus

Maronite Christians could try to stave off major changes in Lebanon's political balance by cutting a deal with Syria. The terms of such an arrangement would include concessions to Syrian interests in return for which Damascus would become the guarantor of Christian preeminence in Lebanon--a situation approximating the circumstances in 1976, when Syrian troops were invited into Lebanon by the Christian government of ex-president Franjiyah.

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Syrian Demands

President Assad will insist on abrogation of the 17 May agreement, political concessions to Syria's Lebanese Muslim allies, and a signal from the Lebanese government that it will abandon the US and Israeli option and reach an accommodation with Damascus. Assad almost certainly has concluded that the current fighting, active Shia involvement along with the Druze, and the visit to Damascus earlier this week of Lebanon's leading Sunni politicians will compel any Maronite regime to come to terms with Damascus.

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Damascus has not called for Gemayel's resignation, however, and the Syrians may be concerned that the situation will deteriorate into full-scale civil war and political collapse. Syria's assets in Lebanon, though effective in mounting pressure on Gemayel, may be considerably less useful in arranging a political resolution of the crisis acceptable to Damascus.

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Muslim victories driving the Christians into a mini-state dependent on Israel and leaving a potentially fundamentalist or radical Muslim rump state are not in Syria's interests. Syria prefers a weak government in Beirut that is politically dependent on Damascus, but representative enough to attract foreign economic assistance.

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